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**From:** editor@mountainwestnews.org  
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Missouri River Below Culbertson

Photo courtesy of  
Rick and Susie  
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**Monday,**  
**Aug. 24, 2015**

Produced by Shellie Nelson, MW News Editor

[Mountain West Voices](#)

**Editor's notes:**

In the **Rockies today**, catching up a bit after our two-week summer hiatus.

The Aug. 5 mine blowout in Colorado that sent three million gallons of contaminated water from a former gold mine near Silverton into the Animas River has apparently cleared that river, although members of the Navajo Nation are skeptical about the Environmental Protection Agency's assurances.

Barbara Theroux of Fact & Fiction reviews ["The Oregon](#)

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In Utah, where Congressman Rob Bishop is working to complete his public lands initiative designed to protect some areas of Eastern Utah, state legislators didn't pull any punches at a meeting before the Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands on Bishop's bill, with state Rep. Ken Ivory saying it does too little to get federal lands under state control.

Utah officials are concerned that President Obama may designate a new national monument in Utah, and some believe Bishop's public lands initiative may be the best way to fend off such a designation.

Wildfire season roared ahead in the West over the past two weeks, with Idaho now leading the nation with 17 major wildfires burning.

And in Beyond the region, Washington state is aflame, with 16 large wildfires burning across more than 920 square miles, and tragically, three wildland firefighters died on Aug. 19 near Twisp.

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**Quote of the day:**



"There is a gun to the head of this state. That gun is loaded and it is wielded by the Obama administration. There are areas worthy of protection. The fact that they still exist speaks to the good stewardship by the people of Utah."

Casey Snider, legislative director for U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop, discussing the [Republican representative's public lands initiative crafted to fend off a presidential designation of a new national monument in Utah](#).  
- Salt Lake Tribune

## Rockies today

### Documents released by EPA detail risk of Colorado mine blowout months ago

The blowout at the Gold King Mine near Silverton on Aug. 5th, which released an estimated three million gallons of contaminated water into the Animas River, was a risk the Environmental Protection Agency knew about more than a year ago, according to information contained in documents released last Friday, although it's not clear if workers at the Colorado mine had taken steps to prevent such a release.

Denver Post; August 23

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- EPA: Water in Colorado river returns to pre-spill condition

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said water samples taken from the Animas River on Aug. 16 and 17 indicate that surface water conditions on the Colorado river had returned to levels before a mine blowout near Silverton dumped three million gallons of contaminated water into the river.

Denver Post; August 24

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### Colorado mine spill creates rift between Navajo Nation, EPA

After a mine spill in Colorado sent three million gallons of contaminated water into the Animas River, which joins the San Juan River in the Navajo Nation, farmers that depend upon the river water to irrigate their crops were left without water, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's effort to provide water elicited complaints that the water provided was contaminated with oil.

Aljazeera America; August 24

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### Protection of federal lands in Idaho, Nevada provide path for Utah

As U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop works toward introducing a sweeping public lands initiative, recent national monument designations in Nevada, as well as U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson's successful shepherding of an Idaho wilderness bill through Congress, albeit with the help of the threat of a national monument designation giving the bill additional momentum, the Utah Republican can gain some insight from what happened in those states.

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Deseret News; August 23

- Federal, state lawmakers disagree on Utah public lands initiative

Last week, staff members for Utah's congressional delegation and Gov. Gary Herbert appeared before the Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands and got an earful from Republican legislators about U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop's three-year effort to put together a public lands initiative, with Rep. Ken Ivory, who champions the transfer of federal lands to states, saying that Bishop's measure does little to further that process.

Salt Lake Tribune; August 20

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Idaho has 17 large wildfires burning, the most in the U.S.

Some evacuation orders were lifted Monday morning in Northern Idaho, although residents were warned to remain aware of wildfire activity and to be ready to evacuate again. Wildfires near Wippe have already destroyed 42 homes and burned across more than 70 square miles in that area of the state.

Idaho Statesman; August 24

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- Warmer temperatures in W. Montana to increase wildfire activity

Cooler weather over the weekend gave wildland firefighters who are battling blazes in Western Montana a bit of a breather, but higher temperatures and increased winds will return today. The Flathead Beacon provides a good roundup of the wildfires burning in the state, including the 18,000-acre Bear Creek Fire in the Flathead National Forest that is currently the largest in the state, and the Sheep Fire near Essex that disrupted vehicle and train traffic last week.

Flathead Beacon; August 24

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Timeline proposed for Badger-Two Medicine lease decision in Montana

The public land managers' timeline submitted to a federal court on deciding the fate of drilling leases on the Badger-Two Medicine area of Montana, an area held sacred by the Blackfeet Nation, proposed making a final decision within two years, and for the first time, included dissolution of those leases as an option.

Flathead Beacon; August 24

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Broomfield company breaks ground on Colorado's largest solar farm

Renewable Energy Systems Americas broke ground last week on the Comanche Solar project near Pueblo, with plans to hire between 300 and 400 workers to build the 156-megawatt facility, which will generate enough power to supply 31,000 homes when it goes online in the second quarter of 2016.

Denver Post; August 24

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TransCanada inks deals with 3 n-gas firms on Energy East project

The Energy East pipeline project proposed by TransCanada to ship Alberta oil east to refineries in New Brunswick and elsewhere got a boost when the Calgary-based company signed deals with three major natural gas distributors that will ensure they have the means to get their product to market.

Calgary Herald (Canadian Press); August 24

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## NEB postpones hearings on Alberta-to-B.C. oil pipeline project

The National Energy Board postponed a series of hearings set for this week on Kinder Morgan Canada's proposed Trans Mountain pipeline project, which would expand the company's ability to move oil from Alberta and Saskatchewan to a port in British Columbia, because a consultant that prepared a report in late 2013 detailing the economic benefits of the projects submitted to the NEB was appointed to the NEB last fall, and officials did not want to open the board to complaints about the hearing process.

Huffington British Columbia (Canadian Press); August 23

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## **Water**

### Report cites climate change as contributor to California's drought

A report published last week by the journal Geophysical Research Letters said that climate change likely intensified the multiyear drought in California by 15 to 20 percent, and also last week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that temperatures around the world in July were the hottest for any month since record-keeping began in 1880.

New York Times; August 24

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## **Beyond the region**

### Washington state gets additional fire crews, equipment

A flood of new firefighters, as well as additional federal equipment to fight wildfires, are arriving in Washington state, where wildfires are raging across the eastern half of the state.

Spokane Spokesman-Review; August 24

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### New evacuations ordered as winds push Oregon fire near homes

The lightning-caused 73,000-acre Canyon Creek Complex near John Day in central Oregon shifted direction on Sunday, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of homes.

Portland Oregonian; August 24

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### Three wildland firefighters killed in Washington state wildfire

The raging wildfires in central Washington claimed the lives of three wildland firefighters on Aug. 19 and severely injured another. The loss of the three men brings the total number of wildland firefighters who have died this year to 13.

Missoulian (AP); August 20

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### Lummi Nation vows to fight Washington state coal port

The proposed Gateway Pacific coal export terminal in Washington state, needed to ship coal from the Crow Nation in Montana, would be built adjacent to an ancestral village site of the Lummi Nation, and the chairman of the Nation, said that he and his people would fight an unrelenting battle to prohibit the port from being built.

Indian Country Today; August 24

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